

52 Miss Sally Seacole in a Robertson-Beato Photograph?

by Dr Douglas J Austin

52

[TWC 34(3) p15 2017]

The Crimean War photographs produced (for sale) by Roger Fenton, James Robertson and others included formal portraits of more or less prominent Army officers (mainly British) and scenic landscapes, often featuring tented or other encampments. Roger Fenton was at work in the Crimea from March-May, 1855, but this article concerns an intriguing image taken, probably in May 1856, by Felice Beato (assistant to James Robertson). Perhaps related to a religious service (Communion?), it is entitled "*Group outside hut, including two ladies, a Minister and horse*".



RCIN 2500630 : Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, 2015

The group consists of four men, a lady and a young girl. From right to left, they include an aide, a minister wearing full Anglican canonicals who has a crucifix (made from lead shot?) before him, a well-dressed lady with a stylish hat and dress (holding her little dog on the table), a well-dressed young girl (with clasped hands) who smiles in the doorway, an officer who displays his sword and his horse, and a partly-concealed aide.

The first questions are - **Who took this picture and when was it taken?** The Royal Collection Trust has informed me:- "...The photograph you referenced is part of a collection of loose photographs by the studio of James Robertson. It is unsigned, though others in the same collection are signed clearly by Robertson. This does not necessarily indicate authorship either way, as a signature only reflects studio ownership and often photographers worked very closely together to handle the technical requirements of wet-plate photography." I see that "The Times" for 18th June 1856 copies a report from Sevastopol (dated 3rd June) which specifically states "Mr Robertson, the superintendent of the Imperial Mint at Constantinople, has sent up an intelligent photographer to the Crimea, and he is now engaged in fixing, as far as possible, every remarkable spot on paper. His works are already known and admired for their precision and clearness, as well as for their command of distant details, and they far exceed in interest those of any of the photographers who have visited the Crimea, so far as the actual aspect of the country, of the batteries, of the ruined city, and of the scenery, is concerned." Dr. David Jones has informed the Yahoo Crimean War Group that "Robertson and Beato's first visit is likely to have been in early June 1855 until sometime after the fall of Sevastopol in September 1855...Their second visit is likely to have been from March 1856 until May 1856. March 1856 is indicated because of an image of British Headquarters in the NAM collection with the handwritten words 'March 1856' on the print. Beato may have taken all the photos during this visit, as has been suggested in the Gartlan reference. They include those of the sea forts on the north shore of the roadstead only accessible after mid-April 1856. " [To them, I would add the image of the 18th Royal Irish Regiment of Foot -

with the handwritten date "May 1856" (<http://www.nam.ac.uk/online-collection/detail.php?acc=1962-08-57-1>).] Bridget and Heinz Henisch (This Journal, 20(2), 26-27, 2002) wrote that the French military painter Jean-Charles Langlois arrived in the Crimea on 13th November, 1855 and left for home on 13th May, 1856. The article by Luke Gartlan "James Robertson and Felice Beato in the Crimea: Recent Findings " ["History of Photography ", Volume 29 (1), 72-80, 2005] excerpts Langlois' letters from the camp. Thus, on 26th April 1856, Langlois recorded the arrival of the photographer at the camp: "He comes here to take photographs of the General Headquarters. ... Most of the officers rejoice and extol M. Robertson largely out of spite for our photographer. I inspected the prints of this M. Robertson; they are generally lacking in effect and colour, but they have the advantage of albuminous glass, that is to say of the delicacy of tone, a great refinement to the point of austerity in the details." The next day (27th April), Langlois continued his derisive appraisal of the newly arrived photographer's work in terms laced with the lofty self-assurance of an academic painter: 'I have them here before my eyes. They are grey, all of the same tone, dry for the most part, and more or less without colour or effect'. On 30th May 1856, Langlois referred for the first time to Robertson's assistant: "We believed that the figure was not Robertson himself but his first student, a replacement. ... One could even add that the latter was the author of the photographs made in the Crimea under the name of his boss; what I saw was to the credit of neither one nor the other." Although Langlois does not refer by name to the protégé, he confirms his identity in the next letter: "M. Robertson came to lunch at the marshal's quarters. I should mention his brother-in-law, M. Beati or Beato Corfioti working in his place and position; he was on my side of the table". I conclude that the RCIN 2500630 was very probably taken by Felice Beato in May, 1856.

While the RCIN image carries no annotation, I can suggest a name for the high-ranking officer with the plumed cocked hat as Brevet Colonel John Studholme Brownrigg (1815-89) of the Grenadier Guards. My identification is based on comparisons of details [Figs (a) and (c)] of two Fenton photographs of 1855 (which specifically state his name and rank) with the RCIN detail - Fig (b) of 1856. Tim Pickles has told me that, as an Assistant Adjutant General, Brownrigg was entitled to wear a cocked hat with white over red feathers with a 6" droop. His red lower plumes would appear black, as in Fig (c), because Fenton's photo-process was orthochromatic rather than panchromatic.

Tony Margrave's *Officers List* provides Brownrigg's career:- First commissioned as Ensign (by purchase) in the 9th Foot July 20, 1832; Lt, May 9, 1835; Capt (by purchase) in the 2nd West India Regt, Dec 29, 1840 ; in the 23rd Foot, May 20, 1842; Lt/Capt in the Grenadier Guards, May 27, 1842; Bvt Maj, Nov 11, 1851; Capt/Lt Col, Sept 13, 1853; Bvt Col, Nov 2, 1855, later antedated Nov 28, 1854 (L.G. Oct 26, 1858). Later advancements took him to General rank in 1878. His decorations included CB (July 27, 1855), Legion d'Honneur (4th Class), Order of the Medjidie (4th Class), British Crimea Medal (Alma, Inkermann and Sebastopol clasps) and the Turkish Crimea Medal.

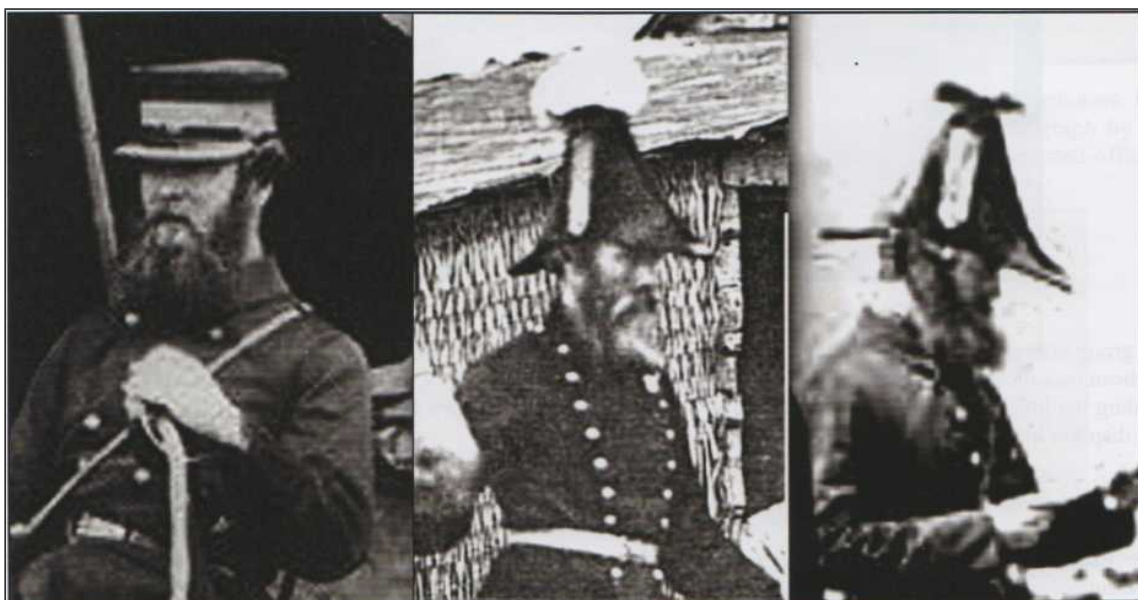
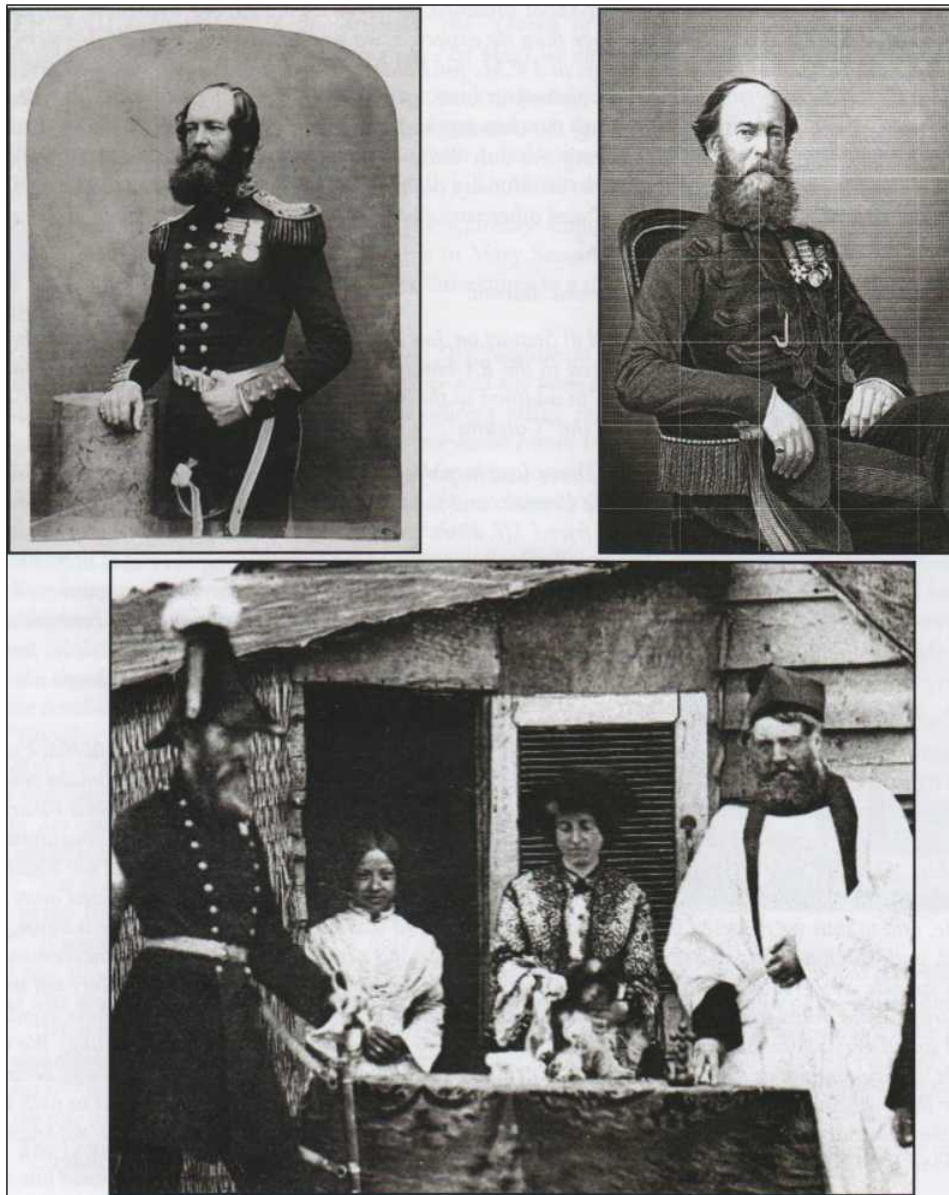


Fig (a) Detail from Fenton Photograph 1855 (Library of Congress)
 Fig (b) Detail from RCIN2500360 (Royal Trust Collection)
 Fig (c) Detail from Fenton Photograph 1855 (Library of Congress)

Brownrigg's recorded service in the Crimea lasted from September 14, 1854 to October 22, 1855. On September 24, he was assigned as Assistant Adjutant General (AAG) to the 1st Division; from December 1854 till October 1855 he was "returned" as an AAG with the army; On March 5, 1855, he was assigned as AAG, Light Divn; in May & June 1855, he was detached on the Kertch Expedition as Chief of Staff to Sir George Brown. (*His letters to Stanhope at Horse Guards, dated in 1854-55, are held by the W. Yorks Archive Service in Bradford as item SpSt/10/4/1. His chilling account, dated 12th November, 1854, of the Battle of Inkermann leaves no doubt of the deadly involvement of the Grenadier Guards.*) From October 23, 1855 to February 29, 1856, he was granted leave of absence on private affairs (medical) in England, extended by Horse Guards, from February 20 to March 31, 1856. On April 13, he was noted as "detained on duty in England". I suggest that he returned to the Crimea for the repatriation of the Grenadier Guards, from Kazatch, on June 3, 1856.

I have found two more images of this officer, both entitled "*Robert Brownrigg*" - a name not in the Margrave List. Both show his CB and his three-clasp Crimea Medal, while one, engraved from a photo, adds his Legion d'Honneur.



RCIN 2500360 (enhanced detail)

Helen Rappaport has suggested that the minister and the mature lady may very well be Dr James Stevenson Blackwood (1805-1882) and his wife Lady Alicia Blackwood (1818-1913). Alicia Lambart (1818-1913) - the second daughter of Viscount Kilcoursie - married the Reverend Blackwood in 1849. During the Crimean War (1854-1856), the Blackwoods ministered to the soldiers and their families at the Scutari Barrack Hospital and Florence Nightingale personally delegated Lady Alicia as overseer of a ministry to the widows and children of the Scutari soldiers. Tony Margrave's Officers List describes Dr Blackwood as a *"Travelling Secretary to the Evangelical Alliance"* and states that he and his wife served from December 18, 1854 to June 10, 1856. Granted one month's leave of absence, they embarked for the Crimea aboard the *"Edina"* on 19th April, 1856, returning on the *"Queen of the South"* on 23rd May of that year. The Blackwoods and two Swedish girls (Ebba and Emma Amroth) were landed in the Crimea from 22nd April 1856. While there, they met Florence Nightingale, who kindly lent them her Bulgarian carriage and mules. It seems clear that at least Lady Blackwood met with (and approved of) Mary Seacole, the sutler and "doctress". Lady Alicia's interesting book *"A Narrative of Personal Experiences and Impressions during my Sojourn in the East throughout the Crimean War"* was published by Hatchard, London (1881).

The following extracts are relevant:-

Chapter XVII includes:- "...For some time past we had entertained the idea and hope that we might visit the Crimea before returning home; and now that our hospital work was so much diminished, and peace had been proclaimed, and as my husband had been fifteen months uninterruptedly on duty without a day's leave of absence, he applied for and obtained permission to take a holiday. We made arrangements, accordingly, to gratify our wishes, and wrote to a chaplain friend stationed near Balaklava, asking what accommodation could be had for our party, consisting of three ladies (*) and Dr. Blackwood. Our friend Mr. Hort (*), ever ready to do a kindness, answered immediately, offering us his own hut, to which also he would get an offshoot attached, to serve as a sleeping apartment for Emma and Ebba.... "... "...On Friday, the 18th April, much sooner than we expected, we were advised of a small steamer called the "Edina " under orders to sail the next day, Saturday, at 3 P.M., for Balaklava, and a passage paper was given to us as before. To make sure, we thought it not unwise to embark at once, as departures were very uncertain, from perhaps some fresh order being found necessary, superseding the time originally specified. We slept on board on Friday night, securing the best berths we could, and which, being the only ladies, we conceived we had the privilege of choosing."... "We arrived outside the harbour of Balaklava on Monday night, but there we remained until the next day, just at the spot where the fearful wrecks of the "Prince" and other vessels had taken place the year before, in the unusually violent hurricane which desolated so many shores..." "

(*) Lady Alicia plus the Swedish girls Ebba and Emma Amroth.

(*) (Rev. Charles Josiah Hort (1820-1887): Arrived at Scutari on Jan 16, 1855; Feb 2, 1856, embarked on the "Imperatriz" for the Crimea; Feb 19, 1856, assigned to the RA batteries near Karani (a village close to Balaklava); Feb 24, 1856, assigned to the Left Wing of the LTC in addition to the Artillery, near Karani; June 17, 1856, ordered to England; July 4 to 27, 1856, passage home aboard the "Calcutta".

Chapter XVIII includes:- "... Every word of the above was in perfect accord with our own feelings, and we should have lost a great sight had we missed the visit to the Crimea; and for this gratification we were, as far as accommodation was concerned, entirely indebted to our good friend Mr. Hort, who left us in possession of what he called Zebra Vicarage - his own hut, and found quarters for himself elsewhere. Miss Nightingale being here also at this time was a great help, as she kindly lent us her Bulgarian carriage and mules. This met us on our arrival, and conveyed us to the "Vicarage," which was three miles from the harbour, situated most beautifully on the rising ground, beneath which the famous but terrible Balaklava charge took place; from hence the whole extent of the plain was visible, terminating only with the heights where the Highlanders were now encamped, a distance of about five miles or more almost without interruption..." "...Zebra Vicarage" was a hut of perhaps twelve feet square, fantastically painted with tar and lime in black and white stripes - hence its name. To this our friend had added a "little chamber" just large enough to contain two narrow camp beds for Emma and Ebba. My husband and I were located in the hut proper. The beds of Zebra Vicarage consisted of hessian bags filled with straw; ours was laid on the floor in one corner; they had been very considerably provided for us by Mrs. Cox, the wife of Major Cox, who lived close by in a real house, but which could not boast of much more accommodation than the "Vicarage." Some other friend lent a large marquee, which was erected quite contiguous to our abode, and to that we resorted for our meals, when the wind was not rude enough to blow it down, an event often threatened, and which actually did occur one evening while we were at tea, causing us most unceremoniously to scramble out as quickly as we could, with the precious cups and saucers in our hands..." "...Mr. Hort left us his servant in the Vicarage, who acted as cook for us in our absence, and as groom when we returned; these combined capacities we had found very useful and had been quite accustomed to them before, at Scutari, in Emilio. We were our own housemaids, always attending to our own rooms, excepting occasionally when the

straw in the bags became more heaped together than we could manage to divide; then a youth was borrowed from some department to help the home servant to give the necessary shake to put the beds a little more in order. But fatigue made them soft, we knew nothing of discomfort, none slept better than we did, and none rose in belter heart and spirits for the day's holiday.. "...Before closing this chapter mention must be made of the far-famed Mrs. Seacole, whose dwelling was quite in the vicinity of "Zebra Vicarage." As the railway from Balaklava to headquarters was only a stone's throw from us on the one side, she had wisely pitched her tent equally close to it on the opposite side; for the line being used for the transport of goods and war material, from the port to the front, doubtless she had a view to facilitating the transport of her stores also to her warehouse. Mrs. Seacole kept a perfect Omnibus Shop, which was greatly frequented; and one must appreciate the wisdom exhibited by the good old lady not only in providing every variety of article, both edible and otherwise, but likewise the tact and never-varying good-nature she exhibited to all her customers; and notwithstanding the heavy prices at which her goods were sold, no one grumbled. No doubt she paid heavy prices herself to provide for the demand; but if these were slightly usurious added to on her behalf towards others, it was always remembered that she had, during the time of battle, and in the time of fearful distress, personally spared no pains and no exertion to visit the field of woe, and minister with her own hands such things as could comfort, or alleviate the sufferings of those around her; freely giving to such as could not pay, and to many whose eyes were closing in death, from whom payment could never be expected. That she did not make her fortune by her merchandise was proved subsequently by her bankruptcy; this was no doubt in consequence of the termination of the war being far sooner and more sudden than was expected.. " (*)

(*) In her book "Sunbeams on my Path", James Nisbet & Co., London (1890) - a sincere and touching work of Evangelical Christian piety - Ebba Amroth wrote:- "When we entered the harbour one fine morning in the month of May it was crowded with vessels of every description. Mr. Hort was on the look-out for us, with a kind of carriage to convey us to the hut he had named "Zebra Vicarage." Opposite to his hut the famous Mrs. Seacole had a little store Jur furnished with provisions. That good Creole woman was well known throughout the British camp for her benevolence and attention to the sick and wounded soldiers."

CHAPTER XXII includes:- "...A fine steamer, the "Queen of the South," bore us away from the harbour of Balaklava, and after a lovely passage [starting ca. 21st May] we entered the Bosphorus again on the 23d of May."

Whoever the adults were, my present interest is to consider a possible identity for the young girl who appears in the doorway. To my eyes, she appears to be 13-14 years of age and was therefore probably born in 1842 or 1843. To my eyes (again), she appears unmistakably of mixed race, with a dark complexion and dark-skinned hands. I now suggest that this may be a photograph of Mary Seacole's (allegedly) illegitimate daughter, who I name as "Sally".

Alexis Soyer's entertaining and wordy book [*"A Culinary Campaign by Alexis Soyer"* with introductions by M. Barthorp & E. Ray, Southover Press, 1995] refers to Mary Seacole many times (pp 142-144: 147: 153-154: 164- 165: 183: 205: 267-269: 295: 297). He refers three times to a daughter of Mary Seacole - twice named as Sarah" and five times named as "Sally" - as follows:-



p 164: "This plan gave me an opportunity of seeing Mrs. Seacole, to thank her for her kind exertions, although the missing pony had not been found. On reaching her place, I found several mounted officers taking refreshment; when Miss Sally Seacole (her daughter), whose name I have not yet introduced, called out - "Mother, mother! here is Monsieur Soyer!" This announcement brought her out immediately, and she exclaimed, "Good luck to you, my son! we have found your pony: come down."

p 205: "As I had to see General Simpson about eleven o'clock, off we went at full gallop, being rather short of time. Mrs. Seacole, who was at her door with her daughter Sarah, had only time to call out, "Go it, my sons!" as we rattled past the house. We arrived in due time, and I saw Colonel Steele, who told me that General Simpson would be happy to receive me directly, and at once conducted me to his audience-chamber."

p 268: "Goodbye, my son," said she; "I wish you had let me taste some of that fine dish you made yesterday." "How could I, my dear mother? I did not know you were there." At this point of the conversation, the Egyptian (*) beauty, her daughter Sarah, entered. "My dear Sally, how are you?" said I, "I never see you in our alley now." "Go along with you!" said smiling Sally; "you are always making fun of me." "Fun of you, my dear? - never. I swear by your blue eyes and black hair, that I never do. Do I, mother?" "If you did, it would not matter; a little innocent mirth now and then does one good. For my part, my son, I could not live without laughing." "Yes; but you told a certain colonel that it was I who was dressed as a Scotchman at the French ball given the other day in honour of the young Emperor," said the daughter. "What harm is there in that? All the great people were invited, and why should you not have been there?" Indeed, do you think mother or myself would go to such a place, where the women wear soldiers' clothes? Not likely. And what soldiers? - the Scotch Brigade!" We all laughed; and I then parted, quite pleased with Sally's modesty. Sally richly deserves the title of the Dark, instead of Fair, Maid of the Eastern War." (*)

(*) N.B. The French word "Égyptien" is synonymous with "Gitane" = "Gypsy". Soyer emphasises her dark complexion, blue eyes and black hair - an unusual combination, but quite possible for a mixed-race person.

Three questions arise:-

- 1) Was a mixed-race girl present in the Crimea? This RCIN image and Soyer's description both indicate **YES**.
- 2) Could this mystery girl have been Mary Seacole's daughter? I believe it to be (at least) **POSSIBLE**.
- 3) If she was Mary's daughter, who was her father? That question is decidedly **UNCERTAIN**.

I, for one, would NOT exclude Mary's husband Edwin Horatio Hamilton Seacole (1803-1844), often dismissed as "sickly" and (presumably?) incapable. Other possibilities include Mary's business partner Thomas Day and Lieutenant General Thomas Bunbury (but emphatically NOT Colonel Henry Bunbury of the 23rd Regiment).

To that trio of suspects, I do NOT wish to add Colonel John Studholme Brownrigg of the Grenadier Guards, although his army record shows that he was assigned to the 2nd West India Regiment in Jamaica from late December, 1840 to late May, 1842. [The 2nd West India Regiment was based at Spanish Town, from 11th August 1839, and from 18th December 1841 at Up Park. *"100 Years' History of the 2nd West India Regiment: 1795-1892"* by Col. J. E. Caulfield, The Naval & Military Press. 2006.] His first marriage, to Katherine Williams-Wynn, took place on Sept 11,

1840 (shortly before his departure for Jamaica) and his first son, also a John Studholme Brownrigg, was born in Spanish Town on 27 June 1841.

Despite much searching, further information on Sally, her parentage and her later life has yet to come to light.

Acknowledgements: I thank the Royal Collection Trust for kind advice and permission to publish image RCIN 2500360 (© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2015), and Colin Coster, Aled Jones, Dr David R. Jones, Tony Margrave, Mike Hargreave Mawson, Tim Pickles, Helen Rappaport and Keith Smith for valuable information.